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SUBJECT: Special Media Reaction: Qatari coverage of the
Iraqi elections, Doha 02/03/2005

1. SUMMARY: All the Qatari papers from 01/29-02/03/2005 provided front-page coverage for the Iraqi elections. The papers focused on the absence of Sunni Iraqi voters in the Elections, linking the poor participation to the deteriorating security situation. Today, all the papers front-paged the Qatari official statement on elections in Iraq. The First Deputy Premier and Foreign Minister Sheikh Hamad bin Jassem Al Thani (HBJ), while presiding over the regular weekly cabinet meeting at the Emiri Diwan, stated the cabinet position that the "elections constituted the first tangible step that will be followed by other steps that would open the door in front of all Iraqis with no exception to take part equally in exerting their rights to rebuilding their nation." This step, the cabinet further stated, "would certainly give Iraqis confidence that the political operation is the only way out of chaos and would ensure the solidarity of the Iraqis toward regaining stability." END SUMMARY

2. Headlines: All the headlines of the Qatari papers on the Iraqi election over the week focused on the security situation, the generally poor participation of voters, the absence of Sunni participation and the heavy Kurdish-Shi'i turn out. Examples of headlines:

Iraq close down the borders and the Iraqis outside voted
Iraq witnessed the first election in 50 years
Exceptional security measures were taken in the night of the elections
25000 people were deployed to observe the Elections in Iraq
Iraqis voted with ink and blood
72 percent participated in the elections
Wide Shi'i and Kurdish participation and tangible absence of the Sunni participation
Ramadi did not participate in the elections, and one voter only voted in Samarra
Life back to normal in Iraq
Iraqi PM Allawi vows to represent all Iraqis
Allawi started dialogue with the Sunnis.

3. BLOCK QUOTES:

1. "Poll's Consequences are still uncertain"

Semi-independent English daily "Gulf Times," (02/01/05):

"Iraqi citizens have been giving some very mixed reactions to Sunday's poll. One doctor told the BBC that he had voted and kissed the ballot box as he did. It is possible that Sunday's election marked the beginning of a great change that will eventually affect the whole Arab world. But it could also be a brief aberration, which will have no long-term effect. Clearly, the Iraqi people would like to take control of their destiny and run their own affairs - without the interference of foreigners and without being subjected to tyranny - but the bullet rather than a ballot may still decide the outcome of the war. The expressions of satisfaction from Washington and London were predictable and even the deaths of some 40 Iraqis, 10 British servicemen and two Americans could not damp their enthusiasm. The real winner, however, was Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, who did not even have the right to vote. He wanted Iraq's Shia majority to be able to make themselves heard and to change the country's political reality and that is what has happened. Officials of the United Iraqi Alliance, formed under Sistanis auspices, believe they have won almost half of the 275 assembly seats. Their exit polls indicate that the Kurdish bloc has come second while Prime Minister Iyad Allawi's secular party being squeezed into third place. As expected, the Sunni community seems certain to be woefully under-represented and the insurgents will continue their fight against the US military and Iraqi authorities. If the problem of Sunni representation is not solved the insurgency will be long and bitter. The danger of the country splitting up is still real and the Kurds actually voted for that in a separate, unofficial referendum. Ultimately, the election has solved nothing. It has produced the result everybody expected and left the Sunnis politically weaker than before."

12. "The suffering of voting, Vote to End the Occupation"

Mazen Hamad, columnist, semi-independent Arabic "Al-Watan"
(01/30-31-02/01):

"Despite the presence of the American occupation in Iraq, despite the destroyed buildings and the dead bodies, and despite the anger boiling inside the chest of the voters themselves, the Iraqi elections on January 30 were a chance to move away from chaos and violence. This election, despite its results, will reveal the true intentions of the United States with regards to its vision of the future of Iraq. This election should push the United States and UK to start thinking of a scenario for leaving Iraq. This Election actually had 57 percent of Iraqi participation and showed that, despite the bombings and explosive cars, the Iraqis were keen to vote and they were not voting only to choose a national government but also they were voting to end the occupation. However, we should not be deceived. The Americans will never leave Iraq or the region until they finally succeed in placing their troops on the borders of Syria, Iran, Turkey, Jordan and Saudi Arabia. The Americans will cut down the number of the visible presence of their troops in Iraq, but permanent American bases will be built in all over Iraq."

MCGEHEE